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# INTRODUCTION

Rural communities are seen to be under threat from ill-conceived and badly designed planning and development. The purpose of a Village Design Statement (VDS) is to enable local people to have a say in how they wish their village to develop in the future so that it does not lose its essential characteristics.

The Rearsby Village Design Statement describes the particular characteristics of our village and makes recommendations ('guidelines') to influence future planning and development. It has been drawn up by representatives of the village in full consultation with the village and the local planning authorities. There are 48 guidelines in all.

The VDS is no paper exercise. Charnwood Borough Council has adopted this document as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This means that private and public planners and developers, builders, landowners, employers, architects and homeowners need to view it so that they can make informed decisions about how their plans affect the village character and environment.

This document is not meant to prevent progress and change. Change is both inevitable and, in many instances, desirable. The purpose is to manage change in a way which harmoniously combines our valued heritage with the needs of the modern world.

## ➤ *The village of Rearsby*



# REARSBY OLD & NEW

## A brief history

*Re(d)resbi: Ingold from Robert de Bucy; Hugh Burdet from Countess Judith; Earl Hugh, formerly Earl Harold. 1½ mills. Suburb of Leicester; medieval bridge.*

➤ *Extract from Domesday Book, 1086*

*Ridge and furrow field near Wreake Drive ➤*



## Early years

Rearsby is over 1,000 years old. It is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 but, as the name indicates, was of Danish origin which therefore dates it to the 9th century. 'Rears' is either a corruption of the Danish word 'rethær' meaning 'redhead' or indicates the name of a Dane called 'Hraoi' or 'Hreioar'. 'By' means farm or dwelling, so that Rearsby means either the redhead's farm or Hraoi's/Hreioar's farm.

The Danes were prominent in the Wreake Valley area as evidenced by the number of villages with the suffix 'by' in their name. But settlements here predate the Danes. Flint blades found at Brooksby date from the Mesolithic period (circa 9,000-4000 BC). Neolithic pottery has been found in the Wreake Valley and Bronze Age barrows (ancient burial mounds) have also been detected. Rearsby itself has crop marks indicating Neolithic and Bronze Age activity.

Evidence of Roman settlement and artefacts have been found where the Rearsby Brook rises at Brooksby and elsewhere in the area. The proximity of the old Roman Road, the Fosse Way (now the A46), reinforces the case for Roman settlement. Angles and Saxons may also have farmed the area as they landed on the east coast and travelled inland in the 6th century, though there is no archaeological evidence to support this.

## Middle ages

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Rearsby amounted to 1,630 acres of land held by four Norman aristocrats. The population consisted of a villein, who held land from the Lord of the Manor of Barrow, three bordars (who held smallholdings on the land and worked for the villein) and a priest. With their families they amounted to about 25 people. In 1377, there were 77 residents and two centuries later about 125. By 1676, the population had risen to 260.

Economically, farming and agriculture dominated the feudal period (ridge and furrow sites can still be seen). There was pasture, meadow, farmland, gorse and heath, gardens, orchards and fishing. Mills (water, wind and horse!) were used to produce bread; doves produced domesticated pigeons. The homes of the villagers were built of local materials such as mud, wattle and daub, and thatch. Traditional timber-framed houses existed later in the 16th and 17th centuries, and brick was in vogue by the beginning of the 18th century. The one substantial building throughout this time was the church, St Michael and All Angels, started in the 13th century and added to over the next two centuries. Set on the highest point of the village, it had an imposing presence over the homes below which would have been clustered around what is now Church Lane and either side of the brook. The original village green may have been in the area now bounded by Brook Street, Mill Road and Melton Road, and would also have been surrounded by dwellings.

*St Michael and All  
Angels Church* ♦



## Progress & development

Rearsby remained a more or less self-sufficient farming community until the 18th century. Enclosure changed all that, and landowners were able to use more experimental farming methods to produce surplus food to sell.

With enclosure came communication. In the 18th century, the enclosure commissioners set about improving the roads through and round the village and establishing public rights of way and bridle paths through the fields. The Leicester-Melton market link road became a turnpike (a toll road) and was suitable for mail and stage coaches. In May 1791, an Act of Parliament was passed to make the River Wreake navigable from Syston to Melton Mowbray. This brought commerce to Rearsby. In 1840, nearly 3,000 tons of coal was unloaded at Rearsby Wharf (at the bottom of Broome Lane). Rearsby train station opened in 1847 (closing in 1951).

Occupations diversified. One of the chief occupations in Leicestershire in the 19th century was framework knitting and many Rearsby inhabitants were involved in this cottage industry, making mainly socks. In 1844, there were 70 knitting frames in the village. By the time of Queen Victoria's reign, the following traders ran businesses in Rearsby: baker, blacksmith, bonnetmaker, brewer, builder, butcher, coal dealer, draper, dressmaker, druggist, grocer, jobber, joiner, maltster, miller, plumber, shoemaker, stone/marble mason, tailor, victualler, wheelwright.

At the turn of the 20th century, Rearsby was a small, still mainly agricultural village clustered round Mill Road, Brook Street, Brookside and the Melton Road. It had a population of only 427. But the modern world soon impinged bringing electricity, piped water, a sewerage system, more housing and commuting. As a result of commuting, the village's old trades began to decline.

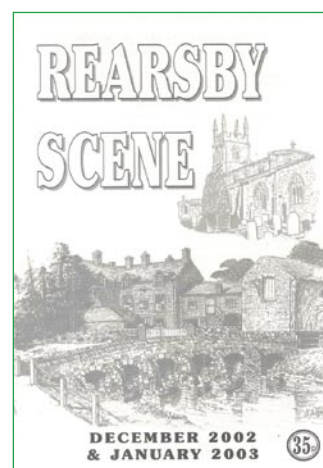
*The village pubs  
compete in the Boxing  
Day Tug-of-War* ♦







♦ A strong village community ♦

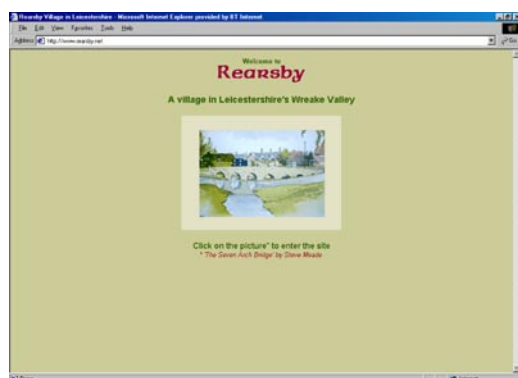


## Rearsby today

Rearsby today is as vibrant, prosperous and committed to progress as it has ever been. With a population of about 1,000, it still has a farming community and local tradespeople. Professionals run businesses from home. The social fabric is strong as evidenced by the many clubs and societies in the village, and the many traditional and new events such as the May Queen and It's a Knockout. The church still has a prominent spiritual and social role; the village hall is a focal point for meetings and gatherings; the school is well supported; and the two pubs provide convivial and refreshing light relief. The Rearsby website at [www.rearsby.net](http://www.rearsby.net) and the village magazine *Rearsby Scene* have made significant contributions to communication and information in the village.

Rearsby people have a strong community spirit and are ready for the challenges of the modern world. Local adverse developments such as the huge increase in traffic on the Melton Road (A607) and the prospect of a quarry at Brooksby brought about large protests which secured funding to build a bypass for the village.

### ♦ The home page of the Rearsby website



The Parish Council has been active in securing a flood warning system for the brook.

Other challenges will need to be faced such as those this document is trying to address. Village amenities will need to be assessed via a Parish Plan, which will open the door to public funding under the Vital Villages programme. A need for affordable housing for old and young (Local Plan Policy H/4) could be assessed via a Parish Council survey. These and other challenges Rearsby will face with confidence and the knowledge that it has 1,000 years of history behind it.

## The geographical context

Rearsby is situated in the Wreake Valley. The village itself is on the banks of a brook which flows into the River Wreake. The valley runs roughly north east to south west. The soil is chiefly clay but also in part a gravelly loam. The village rises on the north side to a hill where the church is, then descends again towards the railway line.

Water is the key to Rearsby's history. The proximity of the River Wreake and the Rearsby Brook have resulted in the settlements we have mentioned previously. Initially, the settlements were grouped around the brook though they have spread out quite widely since, notably in the Station Road area. There are many wells in Rearsby, evidence of its plentifulness.

Water is also a problem for the village. The River Wreake and Rearsby Brook have flooded since time immemorial affecting farmland and, in particular, the dwellings in Brookside.



➤ Flooding on Mill Road

- We value our historic design heritage in terms of the way our landscape looks, the way our village is set out, and the way it is built
- We value our rural setting, the agriculture, landscape, greenery and natural surroundings, and those features and characteristics which make villages different to towns
- We value the brook, the open spaces around it, and the way these together provide a 'heart' to the village
- We value our diverse and varied architectural heritage and the individuality of many of our buildings
- We value the intimate scale of our village which we believe is best determined by small-scale, thoughtful development
- We value the diverse social mix and community spirit in the village which we believe is best sustained by a rate of development slow enough to allow newcomers to integrate
- We value change in a way that mixes the best of the past with the best of the present
- We value development which integrates old with new, concerns itself with identified village needs, and avoids one-way, developer-led change

< **OUR VALUES**  
Rearsby old & new



# THE VILLAGE LANDSCAPE



Rearsby is situated in a valley with gently rising sides to the south east where the Melton Road is situated but which builds up on the west and north side where the Fosse Way is located. The south west looks over to East Goscote (and Leicester), the east to Gaddesby, the north east to Brooksby (and Melton Mowbray) and the north to Thrussington. Roads in all four directions, flanked in all cases on entering the village by trees, make a harmonious and emphatic statement, particularly in view of a general absence of mature trees in the natural landscape.

## Rearsby from Thrussington

The River Wreake is on this side of Rearsby defining our boundary here and flowing north east to south west. Open fields showing their enclosure past make a pleasant vista over to the neighbouring village of Thrussington. This open view can be seen from different locations in the village such as Brook House Close and Wreake Drive and gives a feeling of freedom. Two silage towers rudely intrude from a farm in the distance. Trees in hedgerows appear from time to time and a copse or two is visible to right and left. Ratcliffe and Hoby appear in the distance. A more significant reminder of Rearsby's past is the revamped Rearsby Mill – a smart white building to the west. A glimpse of the similarly disused Thrussington Mill may also be had to the north. The Wreake floods the fields from time to time on this side of Rearsby.

Beyond Thrussington the Fosse Way is seen rising up on the horizon. Looking down over the valley to Thrussington and into Rearsby from the Seagrave Road is an impressive sight. The north side of Rearsby fits snugly on the side of rising land seemingly protected by its trees.



◆ Rearsby landscapes



Rearsby from Thrussington ◆



➤ Rearsby from Brooksby



➤ Two-arch bridge at the allotments

## Rearsby from Brooksby

The approach to Rearsby along the Melton Road from Brooksby gives open vistas into the Wreake Valley and pleasant views over to Gaddesby, though heads will be turned more to north west than south east once the Rearsby bypass is built. Large arable fields on the Gaddesby side run off directly into the Rearsby Brook which rises on this side. Although every effort is made by our farmers to restore ponds and clean out ditches, previous housing development and removal of hedges and trees has exacerbated the problem of flooding in the village. The projected bypass and quarry and any commercial or residential infill will also increase this problem. Rearsby is part of the rising land here so the village seems flat as you approach. Passing some allotments, a valuable village amenity, a corridor of trees salutes you as you enter.

A more considered view of Rearsby on this side is from a footpath off Station Road which leads to Brooksby. The hill on which the church stands continues here to form a ridge which looks over the Wreake Valley and runs parallel to the Melton Road. The familiar views of Thrussington and Hoby appear but now Brooksby, Rotherby and, on the horizon, Ragdale Hall show themselves as the view pans up the delightful Wreake Valley.

The Leicestershire Round footpath is on this side of the village and gives views of the village from north east and south west.

## Rearsby from Gaddesby

Open fields are also significant on this rising side of the village, and a pleasant footpath exists to Gaddesby. Views here will be affected by the bypass however. An industrial development to the south east along the Gaddesby Road appears incongruous in a rural setting, though it has provided some local employment. Any extension of it seems unlikely. Infilling development contingent with the construction of the bypass does not figure as part of the Local Plan, nor is any planned in the immediate future, though this is something the villagers will keep an eye on. The dearth of trees in this area (due to modern farming methods and disease), lack of hedgerows and meadows are significant, particularly with a bypass looming. The village needs more screening from the traffic.

Most of our farms are on this side of the village such as White House Farm, Brook Farm, Glebe Farm and Topfield Farm. White House Farm has six tree preservation orders on it.

➤ Rearsby from Gaddesby





## Rearsby from East Goscote

East Goscote and nearby Syston represent the build up of roads and houses that marks encroaching Leicester. An 'area of local separation' guaranteed in the Local Plan (Policy OT/4) divides Rearsby from East Goscote. This should ensure the 'green wedge' between the two is sustained.

Entering the village from this side the lower Wreake Valley is a pleasant view to the north, and the dapper Rearsby House appears on the left. A footpath leading to East Goscote gives better views. Further over towards Ratcliffe, the Leicestershire Round can be picked up again. This provides good views of the west side of the village including Rearsby Mill at close quarters, a perched Church Leys House (now a convent), and two of our main working farms Rearsby House Farm and Manor Farm. A pretty pond can be spotted in a field near the railway line.



➤ Rearsby from East Goscote

➤ The dapper Rearsby House



- 1 Developers should avoid infill business and residential development between the existing village boundaries and the projected Rearsby bypass in line with the current Local Plan.
- 2 Charnwood Borough Council and Leicestershire County Council, in consultation with farmers and householders, should consider appropriate additional screening such as tree planting on either side of Gaddesby Lane to shield the village from the noise and visual side affects of the proposed Rearsby bypass. Screening could also include the industrial development on Gaddesby Lane.
- 3 Leicestershire County Council should ensure by effective planning, monitoring and control that any extraction of minerals from Brooksby does not pollute the Rearsby Brook or exacerbate the problem of flooding in the village.
- 4 Trees, hedgerows, ponds and ditches provide an important draining function for the village, and our landowners and farmers should, by appropriate field management, maintain and/or restore them.
- 5 Developers, farmers, landowners and utility providers should consider the impact on the landscape of new constructions such as buildings and masts which may adversely impact on views in and out of the village, particularly on the north side between Rearsby and Thrussington. They should either avoid such constructions or use appropriate materials and careful design, siting, and landscaping techniques.
- 6 Developers and householders should avoid large-scale development at the boundaries of the village which adversely affect the rural aspect of the four main approaches as seen from within and without. Where development is considered necessary, they should give full consideration to appropriate design, siting, roofscaping and landscaping techniques to assimilate the change.
- 7 The Parish Council should encourage farmers and landowners to consider the planting of indigenous species of trees in the village landscape to replace those lost in recent times. This could also include trees within hedgerows to enhance biodiversity. Ash, elm, pedunculate oak, willow and yew are our local indigenous woody species.
- 8 The village allotments off Melton Road are a valuable amenity for villagers and should be preserved in line with Local Plan Policy RT/12.
- 9 The Parish Council should ascertain the status of the two ridge and furrow sites off Station Road – one near the level crossing and the other at Conker Field – and decide whether they need protecting and, if so, by what means they can be protected.

< **GUIDELINES**  
The village landscape

# THE WAY THE VILLAGE LOOKS



◆ Centre of the village

## The settlement pattern

Rearsby village radiates from its original settlements round the brook. These extended from Brookside up Church Lane on one side and up Brook Street and Mill Road onto the Melton Road on the other. This is the old heart of the village. The farms and old farm buildings, the famous Seven Arch Packhorse Bridge, the church, the two pubs, and most of Rearsby's listed buildings are all situated here. The original village green was in this area. The Melton Road in fact originally ran down Brook Street and up Brookside until it was bypassed in 1831 to cut down the number of accidents caused by sharp corners and heavy, overladen traffic. Shades of things to come!

◆ Brook Street

In more recent times, new developments have considerably increased the size of Rearsby. New houses have spread Rearsby out along the Melton Road and back around Rearsby Grange. On the north side, there has been a considerable extension including Station Road, Church Leys Avenue, Bleakmoor Close and Wreake Drive. Redevelopments have occurred at Brook House (now demolished) and within the gardens of Rearsby House. Some of these developments have been sympathetic to the character of the village, some not.





## Spaces

Increasing the built environment in a village puts a premium on its spaces. A space has a function; it's not something that is empty and should automatically be filled. It gives a sense of freedom; it allows the natural countryside to run through the village; it makes for good vistas, perspectives and views; it provides social and play areas; it separates parts of the environment that require separation. In some cases, space is closed or restricted, but this too may be important in the design context as with the 'cramped' situation of our old terraced cottages on Melton Road, Brook Street and Church Lane.

The old heart of the village is characterised by cottages which restrict space, but when you come off the Melton Road and go down Brook Street into Brookside, Rearsby opens out in front of you. The brook is key to this, and the new village green in front of the Post Office, both of which form part of a natural centre to the village. From here you can see up Brookside towards Brooksby, view the brook up and down, look upwards towards the church, or gaze off in the direction of Mill Road. You can walk from here in any direction to another part of the village. The park is here too providing another space which opens up invitingly towards the church.

Another valued space is the football field at the back of the village hall, recently enhanced with basketball equipment. There is also an old ridge and furrow area in front of the convent – 'Conker Field' – surrounded by many mature, protected trees, a fine brick wall, grasses and the gardens of Church Leys House. It is like entering a little oasis particularly when you come through the enclosed passage from Church Leys Avenue.

Sometimes the space is provided by footpaths and roads. We are accustomed to seeing the Melton Road as a closed space because of the weight of traffic. This space will open out considerably once it loses its 'A'



➤ *Narrow spaces: Church Lane*

➤ *Open spaces: Rearsby park*



road status. Passageways can be open and closed and we have a good mix in Rearsby. A built-up passageway – like the gap in Wreake Drive on the Leicestershire Round, or the gap off Mill Road leading up past Rearsby House Farm on another section of the Round, or the passage from Church Leys Avenue to the convent – is like going into a tunnel and coming out again. Both experiences are pleasurable. Even small spaces, well designed, can enhance the environment.



Squares and cul de sacs provide an inner space and a feeling of closeness and security such as Westfield Close, Brook House Close, Orton Close, and Bleakmoor Close with its 'turning' green.

◆ *Passageways*